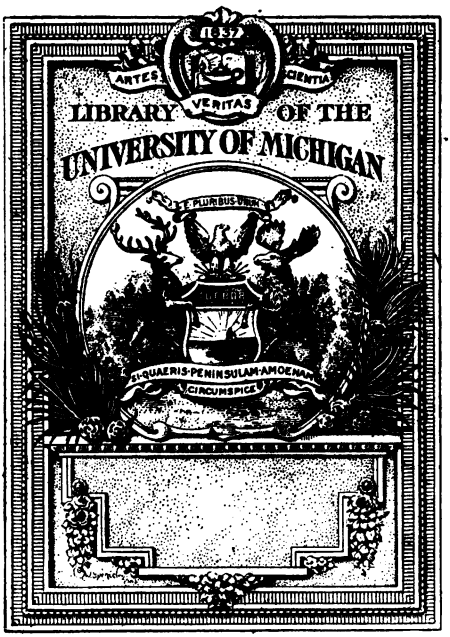

Sincerely Yours,
Geo. C. Miller.

Photo-Mechanical Printing Co., Chicago.

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LAST WORDS IN THE PULPIT:

BY

GEO. C. MILN.

CHICAGO:
FERGUS PRINTING COMPANY.
1882.

To All
Who Believe in Reason
as the
Supreme Authority for Human Conduct,
these pages
Are Sincerely Dedicated.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE utterance of the addresses herein contained—notably the one in which "The Church—Its Future" is sketched—resulted in their author's exclusion from the pulpit of Unity Church, Chicago. They therefore assume an interest, as marking the limits beyond which a preacher in a Unitarian pulpit is not permitted to go, quite independent of any merit or demerit in their style or thought. The writer has no complaint to make over the termination of his relations with the church above mentioned, though he is obliged to characterize the methods employed to secure that result as harsh, abrupt, and crafty.

No comment upon the subject matter of the addresses herewith published is needful; they speak for themselves. But in commending them to the reader's unbiased judgment, the writer ventures the prediction that within a few years such views will be allowed free expression in Unitarian pulpits, or the denomination of that name will have even less vitality and influence than it at present possesses.

GEO. C. MILN.

CHICAGO, *March, 1882.*

THE CHURCH—ITS PAST.

I propose to glance at the past history of that social institution known as the church, for the purpose of ascertaining through what forms, and by what processes, it has reached its present condition; and also that we may with approximate precision forecast what its future will be. To accomplish this purpose with thoroughness—that is to enter into all the details of church history, to analyze closely and accurately the present status of the church, and then to picture with anything approaching to particularity the future which lies before it—would be a task calling for the space of many volumes, and requiring for its performance the learning of the historian, the passion of the scientist, and the imagination of a prophet. Let me, then, disallow at once any such ambitious and wearisome project. Instead of entering into all this infinite variety of detail, I would simply pass before you, with panoramic swiftness, the salient features which suggest themselves as one thinks of the past, the present, and the future of the church. My excuse for calling your thought to this theme, if any excuse is needed, is found in the fact that in the progress of thought upon so-called religious subjects, the divine institution of the church has been called in question, and its value as a constructive and formative instrumentality has been thrown into debate.

It is a common thing today to hear the opinion advanced that the churches are of little value to society, that they impede its progress, that they retard rather than accelerate its evolution into higher and nobler conditions. Mr. Herbert Spencer, I think, has clearly shown that the advance of social science is hindered by those various intellectual preconceptions which he has spoken of as so many "biases" running athwart the straight lines of scientific exactitude. Those who have read his works—and those who have not are to be envied only in view of the great treat which lies before them—will recall his chapters on the "educational," the "political," and the "theological" biases, in which he shows how the encrusted views of bygone days rise up in the pathway of present progress, and how slow and painful, consequently, human development must ever be. And although Mr. Spencer has not yet written out his views in regard to the church, it is easy to prognosticate that he will apply the same logic to it that he has to other institutions, and show that in her obstinate adhesion to the forms and traditions of the past, in her supreme reverence for antiquity, and her ill-concealed distrust of the present, as well as in her reluctance to adapt her forms and her formularies to the advanced thought of humanity, the church too may be classified as an obstructive bias in the path of social science. At any rate, whether our great teacher shall reach this conclusion or no, many of his disciples have already done so; and many more, not his disciples, I hope, and certainly lacking the calm and dispassionate spirit with which he approaches every theme, are heard to exclaim in our time against the church as an

antiquated, useless, and bigoted incubus upon society. So intense and frequent are these sneering exclamations that we who stand within the church can not afford to ignore them. If they are true, then I for one would fain exchange the old ark for a vessel of more modern build. If they are true, the sooner the churches are closed the better for society. If they are false, then surely we should be prepared to show wherein they are false, and if, which is most likely, they are partly true and partly false, why, then, it is our office to discriminate between the true and the false; to profit by the former by modifying the existing forms and statements of the church; to refute the latter by reasonable demonstration.

Perhaps the first inquiry suggested to the mind by the protests against the church, of which we have just spoken, is in regard to its origin. Is the church an institution organized for the defence and propagation of old traditions, of malignant views of the Deity, of derogatory and hypochondriac views of man; was it originated for this work, and has it grown great in doing it? Or is it true that the germ from which the church, as it now exists, has evolved was wrapped up, and of necessity included, in the nature of man himself? If the former hypothesis be accepted, we may as well admit that the days of the church are numbered, for men are tired of hearing themselves described as heirs of hell; weary of hearing the Deity portrayed in repulsive terms; and disgusted with the arrogance of an institution which pretends to a monopoly of divine favor and guidance. But if the latter postulate be accepted, and it is acknowledged that the germ from which

the church has sprung is a constituent and inseparable element in the nature of man, then our only alternative is to so modify the church, as well in ceremonial of worship as in method of work, as to bring it into line with the formative forces of the nineteenth century.

For myself, I need scarcely say to you, that I accept and believe most thoroughly the latter hypothesis. The church is because man is; and man could not have been what he is without erecting an institution analogous to the church. If now we attempt to penetrate the veil of history and reach that distant period when the church existed only in embryonic form, we shall, I think, find corroboration of this view. Of course we can not enter into particulars; for such an attempt brings us to the threshold of that impenetrable mystery, "the beginning of things," and when we cross that threshold and enter that weird domain, we must be prepared to rely on a constructive imagination which will, out of a few fragments of fact, create for us a theory in regard to the origin of the organization, whose history affords such wealth of incident, such enthusiasm of endeavor. There is, I may say in passing, a rather doubtful cause of satisfaction to the student of the church's beginning and growth, in the reflection that the church is not alone in the mystery of its inception. All institutions, all sciences, all arts—yes, even human speech itself—have to confess to the presence of a cloud of mystery above their cradles. Nebulæ and mists enshroud and make forever conjectural the beginning of all things.

Calling to our aid that faculty which has been termed the constructive imagination, it seems eminently probable

that the root from which the church has developed was the religious impulse or instinct which all men possess in common. Schleiermacher attempts to describe this instinct when he says: "With reference to the infinite, as the unity of the universe, man has a feeling of absolute dependence. In this feeling religion has its root." That is in a feeling of dependence. This estimate seems to me just but inexact. I should modify it by saying that primitive man, being thrown into contact with nature, observing its forces but not comprehending them, must have experienced the conviction that there was in the force which lay back of all phenomena, himself included, a power superior to any possessed by himself. This conviction constituted between himself and this unseen force the relation of superior and inferior. Prehistoric man felt, we may safely suppose, the presence of, though he could not clearly discern or describe it, a cause comprehending all causes, and in his attempt to trace phenomena back to some known and appreciable source, I believe we have the germ of that mysterious feeling which I have termed the religious impulse. Man found himself alone in the world. He saw about him other and inferior forms of life, but in point of superiority of nature, in the possession of higher and more varied powers, he was relatively alone. And yet his own nature, its subjection to forces beyond his analysis, as well as the vast and ever-increasing marvels of life in the lower ranges, constantly impelled him to seek for that originating force which he has never found. Mark the assertion—"which he has never found," I say. For, while the theologian may fondly suppose he has solved the riddle by call-

ing this inscrutable force "God," he has in fact but carried it one step further back, and in doing so made it more mysterious than ever. Nor has the prying philosopher succeeded better. Resolving all elements into an original element supposed to include all, he has had, according to the first grave-digger's advice to the second,

> To confess himself ——

when asked to account for the origin of this primal element. And the man of science, without attempted concealment, confesses himself as dazed by the same wonder. In truth, when we try to account for the origin of things, whether by the crucible of science, the hypothesis of philosophy, or the dogma of theology, we have to confess ourselves, one and all, as agnostics. We don't know, and, moreover, we do not find any one else that does. But this very mystery which enshrouds the beginning of things, involving the recognition of a force beyond our analysis, this it is that I take to be the germ of that religious impulse which is in turn the root from which the church has developed.

So far we have only accounted for the presence of the religious impulse in man, and have affirmed the belief that in it is found the germinal form of all subsequent religious organizations. The next step, manifestly, is to trace this germinal form till we find it blossomed forth into the institution to day known as the church. To do this, and still adhere to the telegraphic brevity of the modern sermon is not easy. But let us at least essay the task. It can scarcely be needful that I forewarn you that this method of accounting for the church is inimical to, and destructive

of that theory of the church which regards it as an institution divinely originated and appointed—as an institution, in a word, "let down from heaven," like the New Jerusalem, "as a bride adorned for her husband." To no such view as this can I subscribe. I see the church, rather, new-born and naked in the nature of primitive man, and as I watch it in its progress across the centuries, I see it gathering its garments, some grotesque, some repulsive, some beautiful, from the different lands and the various civilizations through which it has passed. In other words, the church, in common with all other human institutions, has undergone a gradual transformation from its simple and primitive form into a more complex and differentiated form. If this is not true, then at least the church is the one solitary exception to the universal law that heterogeneity of structure keeps pace with the evolution of the organism.

Suppose, then, for an instant, we place ourselves beside primitive man, as he experiences the conviction already referred to, that there is in the universe a mysterious force transcending and including all other forces; what are the steps we shall have to take in order to reach something analagous to the church as it now is? They are, I am glad to say, few and simple, though stretching across vast reaches of time. First, we shall see an attempt on the part of primitive man to propitiate this mysterious power; an attempt to court favor with it. Witnessing its malevolent as well as its beneficent manifestations, he would attempt to ingratiate himself in its favor, and to avert from himself its injuries. This attempt would express it-

self either in self-humiliations, in self-inflicted tortures, in the offering of sacrifices, or in any other form which might suggest itself as acceptable to the untaught imagination of early man. I think the myth of Cain and Abel enshrines this idea in picturesque form. Abel, who was a shepherd, as the story runs, "brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof," while Cain, "a tiller of the ground," "brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord." Thus would primitive man seek to propitiate the unseen power which he believed to exist, and to this germ form we may, I believe, trace back whatever of sacrifice or ceremony is still found in the church.

A second step away from the simple and toward the more complex church form will bring us to the church of the family. This arose, we may suppose, out of the natural superiority of the father, which would make him the most appropriate person to approach and propitiate the unseen, and also out of the natural convenience of such an arrangement. This system we find in vogue in the early patriarchal days pictured in the Hebrew scriptures; the father being not only judge and general of his numerous progeny and following, but also the only priest they ever knew. Another step will carry us to the tribal priest, who for a single tribe would offer sacrifice and utter invocations. And at this point we see the origin of the priestly class which has continued to this day, which has often pretended in the past, and in many cases still pretends, to possess certain prerogatives and powers directly bestowed upon it by the Deity. I will not stop to moralize, but if I were to do so, I should express a regret that the priestly

class was ever allowed to arrogate to itself the kind of go-between-ship which has proven, I am sure, more of a curse than a blessing to humanity. Supposing the mysterious force of which I have spoken to exist under the terms of personality, what right has one man to suppose that his approach to it will be more favorably received than his brother's? But this, of course, is the radical assumption upon which all the claims of priestly authority and prerogative will be ultimately found to rest, and the sooner any such assumption is obliterated from human thought the better will it be for the growth of rational religion and pure morality. I have not, so far, as you have doubtless observed, made reference to the transformation of belief in regard to the unseen power, and the relation sustained toward it by man. This, of course, would immediately precede any radical change in religious ceremonial and practice; and would be, also, as susceptible to the influence of new phases of thought as the religious ceremony to novel forms of procedure. As man's knowledge of the forces of nature were enlarged, as he attained to more accurate information in regard to those forces, in all their varied manifestations, he would of necessity grow into wider and more intelligent views of the one great force behind all forces. And, if you will follow a single digression, it is in the fact of this unceasing enlargement of view upon natural phenomena and their causes that we have the explanation of the ever-changing theological conceptions of the ages, and the promise of still other and greater changes in the future. There can be no fixity of theological conception, because each generation, with its increasing

knowledge, will formulate its conception of the primal cause, and in formulating it, change or overturn the conceptions of past generations. "Ultimate fixity of opinion," in regard to the whole range of philosophical and theological subjects, "is here unattainable."

But we have now reached a point where the church appears as something concrete and organic. The tribal or race church has peculiarities of organization and spirit which place it well within the range of close examination. It was under this form that the church existed among the Jews.

They were a "peculiar and a holy people," were all included in the church, on the ground of their birth or adoption into the theocracy. And of this national church, that is a church which includes a man, because of his birth, and not on the grounds of any subjective change in the man himself—there are two striking and antithetical peculiarities. The first is its wide inclusiveness. It embraces all sorts and conditions of men, provided they are born within certain limitations. The meanest and the loftiest Jew, the noblest and the unworthiest stood on a common plane in regard to the church and its privileges. No test was imposed, no concession required. It was enough that they were the children of Abraham, the head of the church, and the "Father of the Faithful."

The other peculiarity of this form of the church is its absolute exclusiveness. Upon its altar was written "salvation is of the Jews," and in the dispensation of its mercies and dignities it was as close a corporation as a nineteenth-century railway company. Bishop Horne, speaking on this

subject, says: "The Jews became proud of their titles, and of their ecclesiastical privileges, extending their charity only to those of their own faith; while toward the rest of mankind they cherished a sullen and inveterate hatred, accounting them to be profane persons and sinners." Still their exclusiveness did not prevent their admitting proselytes who would submit to the customary initial ceremonies of circumcision and baptism.

I have thus briefly, but I trust with some distinctness, traced the church from its germinal form in the attempt of man to account for natural phenomena, down through the successive stages of individual, family, tribal, and national evolution. And, I may at this point say, that all the facts involved point to a similarity of origin for all churches. Trace back the religion of Egypt, of Greece, of India, of ancient Rome, or of the Jews, and you will find their source in the simple attempt to account for natural phenomena by detecting their cause. This attempt, blended with the reverence and awe felt toward that unknown cause, undergoing various modifications on its journey through the centuries, will be found in a last analysis to be the one thing in common between all religions.

I shall spend little time in a description of what the church has been during the Christian era. Early Christianity gave a new form to the church by wedding Jewish monotheism to pagan ceremonial. It maintained the old exclusiveness of the theocracy, but based it upon subjective grounds rather than upon mere considerations of birth. It excluded, and still excludes, all who have not been born again. Its privileges and immunities, together with its

promised rewards, were withheld from all but those who had passed through the subjective changes prescribed by its dogmatists; and, speaking generally, these characteristics of exclusiveness as toward the alien, and inclusiveness as toward the saint, have clung to the church throughout its history. Heaven glittering with ten thousand indescribable glories, peace of heart in the sense of forgiven sin, the security and defence of ecclesiastical ceremonial, it has ever held before the eyes of its devotees. The soul once within its charmed circle, no power could interpose between it and salvation. On the other hand, for all who have rejected her overtures and conditions the church has reserved indescribable tortures in the future, a guarantee and foretaste of which she has sometimes disbursed in the present. Hell, dark and deep, for all without her lines; heaven, holy and glorious, for all encircled by her arms!

I will only add a single concluding remark in drawing this sketch of the church's past to a close. It is this: There has always been, and still is, a division of opinion within the church as to the relative authority of the church and the bible. Romanists practically have maintained the superiority of the church. The church only can interpret the scriptures. Protestants, on the other hand, have maintained the superiority of the scriptures. Chillingsworth's famous axiom, "The bible, and the bible alone, is the religion of Protestants," has received almost universal endorsement among Protestants. This dictinction gives rise to an infinite variety of differences in ceremonial, in dogma, and in the polity of the church, in regard to which I have

not time to speak today. I will only say at last, that while Protestantism threw off the yoke of the church,—a grievous and burdensome yoke,—she bowed her neck to the yoke of an infallible book, which it will take a gradual evolution or another reformation to release her from. The church of the past, then, is an institution growing out of the religious impulse in man's nature, gathering to itself certain forms and ceremonies for the expression of its supplications and devotions, arrogating to itself certain prerogatives and monopolies, and exercising a more than autocratic sway over human thought and human conduct. Inasmuch as it has disseminated elevating moral views, it has been of value as a constructive force in society, inasmuch as it has propagated repulsive views of Deity, degrading views of the nature of man, narrow and erroneous conceptions of the universe, it has been destructive to human happiness and an impediment to human welfare.

THE CHURCH—ITS PRESENT.

I am to speak to you today about the present condition of the church, and will at once confess how numerous the temptations are to exaggerate and distort the facts in the line of one's prejudices with which this task is surrounded. It is always so easy to underestimate the excellences and to multiply the defects of a system beneath criticism. It is always more than difficult to apply the method of a calm analysis to a system in behalf of which all our emotions and traditional convictions are enlisted,—to hold up to the light its faults, and honestly to point out the weaknesses which have become part of its life. I shall be thought bold, perhaps, then, if I attempt to speak upon this subject from a middle ground; if I refuse either to endorse extravagantly the present posture and methods of the church, or if I decline to join those who condemn without discrimination the church and all its belongings. Dr. Abbot, in the introduction to his volume of sermons delivered before the University of Oxford, divides thinkers on religious subjects into three classes: The conservative party, which is for preserving everything as it is; the destructive party, which is for simply cutting loose from the past, and deriding alike its opinions and its institutions; and the "party of growth," which, while it expects more of the future than of the past, will not reject whatever of

value the past may bequeath to it. This seems to me the happy mean between two dangerous extremes, and in this spirit I shall attempt to proceed.

It will be remembered that in our attempt to trace the church back to its germ form we found it rooted in a religious impulse,—itself the outgrowth of an attempt to find a cause back of all effects,—which is a constituent element in man's nature. We may now, therefore, safely go on to say that some form of religion and some form of church will continue to be so long as man continues to be. So long as there is a "background of mystery" behind the procession of human thought and human experience; so long as men continue to ask, in the language of the eloquent speaker who addressed you last Sunday evening* as they study the enigma of life, "What does it all mean?" so long will there be something corresponding to that which we now call religion; so long will there be something analogous to the church. "The church is," I said a week ago, "because man is." Let me now add to that the affirmation that so long as man *is*, the church will also *be*. There is one remote contingency which may suggest itself to some acute mind at this point,—namely, that in a higher stage of development, man may outgrow his dependence on organization. Now, as we know, all ideas and sentiments, in order to live and have influence, must be organized; the time may come, however, when man will have outgrown the necessity of fortifying his opinions and his purposes with organization. At such a stage in his development, man might indeed be without a church; but the

* Prof. Felix Adler.

glimmer of that day's dawn is not yet visible to the keenest eye, and we will not, therefore, permit it to enter into the discussion at this time.

Another thought which will serve as subsidiary to what has been said, and as preliminary to what will be said further on, is in regard to the constantly evolving church form. There has been a constant variation of form in church organism from the time when there was awakened in man the earliest religious impulse, and there is no sign at present that the last and highest form has been reached. The church, like the chameleon, which changes its colors in different surroundings, has assumed not only different tints, but also different forms, as it has progressed through the centuries; and because we have every reason to believe that it will follow the same laws in the future which have governed its past, we also have every reason to believe that the transformation in church form will keep pace with the transformation in the intellectual and social life of man. Indeed, as the church is the organic outgrowth of a constituent element in the nature of man, its evolution into other forms will be conterminous with the progress of man himself. As man goes higher, as he lays aside the lower and grosser phases of existence and ascends into the range of noble sentiment and lofty imagination, so also the church will gradually lay aside its material forms and child-like symbolisms and enter upon a more ethereal, a more spiritual career.

But I am permitting myself to look too much into the future. What I want specially to dwell upon at this time is the present phase of church life, to consider its present

forms and fortunes, as well as the present dogmas from which its forms proceed, and which have so much to do with shaping its fortunes.

And, first of all, it must be noticed that the church no longer exerts the influence or retains the hold upon the public heart which it has in other days. Not only is its authority less, not only is it less absolute in its sway over human conduct, but it is not able to compel in our times the enthusiasm for its work and services which has marked and glorified its career in other days. "Thousands of most excellent people avoid churches," says Col. Ingersoll, "and, with few exceptions, only those attend prayer-meetings who wish to be alone. The pulpit is losing its power because the people are growing." Whether this may prove to be the cause or not, I do not know; but this, at least, we all know: that the churches which should be thronged with eager worshipers, are left half empty at every service, unless, indeed, some unusual person or cause serves to excite a spasm of curiosity, and thus calls out a larger audience. By careful observation, on my own part and on that of reliable witnesses, I have ascertained that with a few notable exceptions the churches of this City are rarely, if ever, more than half filled at the Sunday services. Observe, if you please, that this apathy is not confined to any one circle of churches. It includes and affects all. The Presbyterians feel it, and have recently sent a commission through the churches of this place to ascertain and remove, if possible, the cause of the indifference of which I speak. The Methodists feel it, and are found often discussing ways and means for its removal. The Congregationalists con-

fess to the same lethargy, and, if they did not, their empty pews and stereotyped prayer-meetings would do it for them. The Episcopalians suffer in the same way, for I myself have found their largest and most popular churches so poorly attended that only the most ingenious of ushers could at all spread the congregation out into the semblance of respectable dimensions. And the Unitarians — well, everyone expects that we shall have small audiences. We preach a doctrine for which the world is not yet ready, and can not expect to catch the multitude. At any rate, we may as well honestly confess that this church, both during the incumbency of Robert Collyer and myself, could contain twice as many people as ordinarily gather here at the Sunday service. And if we take the country through, it will be found that the churches are poorly attended, that their enthusiasm is at low ebb, and that they are striving, with a kind of daze, to account for their empty pews and their waning ardor. I found the other day in *The International Review* for August, 1881, this interesting statement: "A canvass was made of fifteen of the most prominent and popular Protestant churches of New-York City. Two of the churches were found to be 'nearly full,' but by no means crowded; one as 'three-quarters,' five as 'two-thirds,' four as 'one-half,' and one as 'one-quarter full.' In the remaining two only one-tenth of the seats were occupied. In fifteen of the most popular Protestant churches of New York, capable of holding twenty thousand worshipers, only ten thousand were assembled on a pleasant October Sunday." And I feel quite sure, judging from my contact with ministers, from my own observations, and from the

common complaint in the religious press that the figures I have given may be regarded as rather over than under the general average. There is one exception to this rule. Need I say it is found in the Catholic communion? Wielding an autocratic sway over the souls of her devotees, the church employs methods to compel allegiance from which the more tender conscience of Protestanism would shrink with alarm. Absolution, extreme unction, yes, and even "Christian burial," are refused to unfaithful Catholics; while the back-slidden Protestant is introduced into heaven with all the eulogistic platitudes which tradition has embalmed and which custom demands.

Another phase of the waning of church-life of which I have spoken is also suggested by the article from which I have already quoted in *The International Review*. I mean the falling off in the number and quality of the men entering the Christian ministry. I have not space to give the complete tables, but will quote the figures which refer to the number of graduates leaving our leading colleges who enter the ministry. Take Harvard first. Between the years 1742 and 1750, of forty-five graduates twenty-six became ministers, or 53.3 per cent of the whole number. You will understand that by this reference to three-tenths of a minister no disrespect is intended. It may be supposed that the three-tenths in question went to work quietly in some obscure parish, waiting for the other seven parts of a whole minister to happen along, which it may or may not have done. In our day the union of the fractions sometimes never occurs, and parishes have been known to worry along through a term of years with but three-tenths of a minister

in the pulpit. Between the years 1861 and 1870, of nine hundred and ninety-seven graduates, sixty-seven only became clergymen, or only 6.7 of the whole number, as over against 53.3 out of forty-two graduates at the earlier day. Yale shows a somewhat-increased percentage, 15 per cent of the graduates between 1861 and 1870 having entered the ministry, as over against 75 per cent between the years 1702 and 1710. Princeton, though still illustrating the general decline, is better off than either Yale or Harvard. Between 1861 and 1870, she sent 20 per cent of her graduates into the ministry, compared with 50 per cent between 1748 and 1760. This very remarkable decrease in the number of men entering the ministry should not be wholly attributed, I think, to the decline of religious enthusiasm. There have been other causes at work, such as the opening up of other literary pursuits and professions to men inclined to letters; but it can not be denied that the loosening grip of the old theologies, causing a decrease of sectarian fervor, must be regarded as the most important factor in this result. I do not wish to enlarge further upon this point. Enough at least has been said to illustrate my statement that the church no longer exerts the influence or retains the hold upon the public heart which it has done in other days. Enough has certainly been said to afford food for reflection to those who wish to maintain the negative of that proposition.

We shall turn now with greater interest to an examination of the leading forms under which the church may be said to exist at the present time—with greater interest, because, having thus seen the signs of decay in the church as

it at present exists, we should be on the alert to discover what cause there may be in the church—in its doctrines or in its methods—for its loss of power among men. When Martin Luther broke away from Rome and instituted the great Reformation, the cause of his rebellion was found in the arrogance and corruption of the Romish hierarchy. When Wesley broke away from the forms and traditions of the English church, it was as a protest against formalism and indifference he went out; or, if we seek an earlier advent from an established church, when Jesus denounced the Judaism of his day, and sought to inaugurate a new movement, his greatest charge against the church was that it had substituted form for spirit, ceremony for righteousness, dogma for life; and I think we shall find back of the indifference toward the church, of which I have spoken, some cause or causes which will not only account for it, but which will, in time, produce another revolution in the wheel which carries the church gradually away from crudity toward ideal conditions. I shall confine myself to the church as it exists among ourselves,—that is, the Christian church,—not because I regard the churches of the Orient, of Egypt, of India, or of Greece, as unworthy of notice, but because it is altogether impossible within my present limits to speak intelligibly of more than one.

The Christian church of our times is divided by a most distinct line into two sections. On one side this line is the Romish church, with its half-sister, the Greek church; on the other is the array of sects which unitedly consent to the term Protestant. The first of these, that is the Romish communion, has by far the best organization, and is therefore

best calculated to hold together, as well as to propagate its faith. It consists of those men and women "who profess the same faith, who unite in the communion of the same sacraments, are subject to lawful pastors, and specially to the pope." It professes to be infallible in matters of faith, and thus forever asserts the superiority of the hierarchy over the individual conscience. In the hands of its priests is lodged the gift of eternal life. They can forgive sin or they can suffer the sinner to go unforgiven into that dark and mysterious realm which, to many souls, is fraught with indescribable terrors. Upon the bosom of the church the weary, storm-tossed soul may lay down its head, and, soothed by the mystic touch of the church's absolving hand, bid farewell to every fear. The keys of heaven are lodged in its hands. It opens the gate, and no man shuts; it shuts, and no man opens. Armed with these august and terrible pretensions, the Church of Rome has held on its way. It seldom loses those once within its grasp. Assuming to stand next the very throne of God, and indeed to be on the earth in God's stead, the Romish hierarchy has fascinated the imagination, subdued the ferocity, compelled the faith, and extorted the obedience of the past ages. Lytton, in his sketch of Cardinal Richelieu,—truer in its adaption to theatrical effects, by the way, than in its representation of the great cardinal as he was,—has thrown a light upon the potent fascination which the church once possessed. Julie de Mortemar, commanded to attend upon the king, is saved from the snare of royalty itself by the mystic power of the church. Cries Richelieu:

Ay, is it so?
Then wakes the power which in the age of iron
Burst forth to curb the great and raise the low.
Mark where she stands!
Around her form I draw
The awful circle of our solemn church.
Set but a foot within that holy ground,
And on thy head—yea, though it wore a crown—
I launch the curse of Rome!

Nor has the Church of Rome lost this mysterious power over men's minds. Diminished as its influence is by the diffusion of intelligence, undermined as its pretensions are by the sway of democratic principles, it manages still to hold men's minds in a most magical bondage—still to assert those extravagant claims of supernatural authority upon which all its success is founded. Better, perhaps, than any other of the sects is Rome holding on its way, and yet the work of decay has long since commenced, and even now her claims are resented by many and debated by more. Kings no longer bow for her blessing. The Vatican no longer serves as the court of arbitration for Christendom. And especially in this land is Rome being made to feel that the day of her chief glory has already passed, and that it will soon be the task of some industrious historian to write "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church," as Gibbon wrote "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." The great fact against Rome in our day is not her history,—for mankind has displayed a most astonishing facility in forgetting the "Holy Inquisition" and the bloody cruelties of "St. Bartholomew's day,"—but the flood of intelligence which is spreading throughout the

civilized world. As men grow into a knowledge of nature and nature's laws; as they give thought to the nature and possible destiny of the human race, the jugglery of Rome loses its facination, the "awful circle of the solemn church" no longer stops the hand of power, and her sacred vestments become cheap and often very ineffective displays of millinery. The age, then, is against Rome. The school-book and the pen will at length achieve her downfall.

On the other side of the line which I have described as dividing the church into two sections, is to be found, as you well know, a multitude of religious sects, divided from each other often by inconsequential differences. To speak of them all is quite impossible at this time, and I shall, therefore, divide them according to their nearness to, or farness from, the position of the Romish church. And if we stop long enough to consider what this nearness to or farness from Rome implies, we shall find it means very much the same as nearness to or farness from a supernatural conception of the origin and nature of religion. The sect which approaches nearest to Rome is the high-church Episcopalian. In ceremonial and all the details of liturgal practice it presses so close to the methods of Rome that but for one thing one might easily suppose himself within a Romish church when witnessing a "high-church" service. That one thing, I need scarcely say, is the very defective character of the imitation. Beside the splendid pageantry and glitter of the Romish ritual, the high-church ceremony reminds one of the weakness and insipidity of private theatricals compared with the legitimate drama. But in the matter of accepting the supernatural theory of religion, and so

far as resting its faith upon the Christian mythology, is concerned, this branch of the church approaches most nearly to the Roman standards. It serves the purposes of those who need object-lessons in religion; who need the guidance of symbols, and who are best led to holiness of life by the perpetual reminder of a complete and formal ceremony. Grading down from this section of the church are the other Protestant sects,—Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and the entire list of them,—all clinging with tenacity to the theory of a supernatural origin for religion, and all alike holding to the bible as the infallibly inspired word of God. If now we glance for an instant at the strength and the weakness of these sects at the present time, we shall find it in the single fact of their supernatural claims. With the weak, the sentimental, the poetic, and the undiscriminating, their very mystery is a charm. To destroy the illusion of the immaculate conception, to deny the fact of a physical resurrection, to rob the bible of its divine authority, would be like robbing the sky of its light and blotting out all its stars. There is a most potent, and, as I think, a most injurious fascination to many minds in the very mystery which conceals the origin of Christianity, which suffuses with an unreal and mystic light the manger-cradle of Jesus, which hung about the mount from which it is fondly supposed he was caught up into the expectant heavens. With many, I say, this supernatural—or shall I say this unnatural—glamour which glosses over all the biography of Jesus, as well as all the historic development of the early church, is an element of strength and of glory. But this very fact is also the weakness of the system with multitudes of sincere

and thoughtful men today. There is to such men too great a savor of the Oriental myth connected with many of the facts of which I have just spoken. They defy analysis by withdrawing into the citadel of a divine and infinite origin. One stands by the cradle of Jesus, and is told that his life began not as other lives, but that with a human mother and a divine father he can be fitly called neither God nor man—but a combination of both; and the tale is too great for our credulity. We instinctively think of the similar birth of Buddha, and of the Grecian mythology, in which the gods occasionally contracted alliances with the women of our earth; and so I might run on—but I will not—to say that the essential weakness of Christianity today is its attempt to unite most beautiful ethical teachings with a supernatural origin and preservation. When the churches of the day teach a pure morality, and base that teaching upon human experience of the value of such morality, they are strong. When they appeal to the ghostly fancies of ancient times, when they import the myths of the Orient into the nineteenth century, then they are weak, and then, too, they are unconsciously weakening the influence of the institution which should and may prove the salvation of society.

But I must devote a page to some slight reference to the sects which are farthest away from Rome. I mean those which have most widely departed from the supernatural conception of religion. No sect has as yet boldly announced itself as entirely denying a supernatural origin for its religion. So dear to the human heart is the shroud of mystery, so fond are we of the magnifying qualities of fog,

that few have quite dared to expose their religion to the clear and mistless light of noontide. The Unitarians have approached this posture more nearly than other sects, I suppose, and yet, even they have not cut entirely loose from supernaturalism. Still they attribute to Christianity a kind of quasi-supernatural origin; still they import from another world motives for conduct in this; still they hold fast to the most difficult miracles while rejecting the most easy. But the time is at hand when, if true to ourselves, we shall reason of religion on an entirely natural basis: when we shall no longer journey to ghostland to find incentives to righteousness, when we shall take ethical culture as the subject matter of our teaching, and experience as the Alpha and Omega of our motive.

And here I must close this rapid sketch. Let me leave behind no misapprehension. I have endeavored to show what seems to me to be the weakness and the strength of the different churches. Many of the ideas I have described are very repugnant to my nature, but I have tried to be moderate in speaking of them, and I will finish by saying that as a benevolent institution, inaugurating and guiding magnificent works of charity; as a shelter for weak and timid souls who need encouragement in the present and the inspiration of ghostly authority as they part company with life, and as a means of drawing men and women into pleasant fraternal relations, the church is still—notwithstanding its many incongruities—of great use to society.

THE CHURCH—ITS FUTURE.

SOME centuries ago, the Christian Church arraigned a notable scholar for daring to announce the monstrous doctrine of the earth's rotundity. He had reached this conclusion as the result of painstaking and persistent study, and naturally held fast to it with something akin to tenacity. The church authorities attempted to extort a recantation, but Cecco d'Ascoli had in him that mysterious something which is popularly known as the "courage of one's opinions," and he refused to renounce his well-earned conviction, though heaven itself should fall. In those days the church had a rather summary way of dealing with heretics. It believed in cremation, and practised it, unlike ourselves, upon the living instead of the dead! The progressive scientist who denied the flatness of the earth was led forth to the stake and burned; and, be it said to his eternal credit, he went out of the world illustrating a serenity and beauty of spirit in wide contrast with that of his devout executioners. Some time after this slight ecclesiastical amenity it was accidentally discovered that the earth in good truth was round, and that the old theory of its flatness must be abandoned. But poor D'Ascoli was already burned; the winds of heaven had already gathered his sacred ashes on their wings that they

might carry them to distant lands—a legacy and an inspiration to all succeeding heretics.

I do not mention this incident because it impresses me as a peculiarly pleasant reminiscence of Christian history, but for the purpose of deducing from it the moral that the church sometimes strikes its match of bigotry too quickly, and kindles, under the impulse of fanatical ardor, flames of persecution, whose light in the future serves only to reveal its own ignorance and guilt. The church of today may at least learn from this and similar incidents, with which, by the way, the pages of history are stained a bloody hue, to be exceedingly careful in reaching conclusions in regard to new statements of religious truth. It might burn another D'Ascoli, and then how sorry (!) it would afterward be.

The addresses which I have already delivered upon the past and present of the church have evoked, as I am well aware, some criticism. This criticism has, in many cases, been very wide of the mark. Much of it has grown out of a misunderstanding of language which I heroically strove to render entirely lucid and level to the ordinary intellect. But such is the common fate of one foolish enough to indulge in discriminations, and I must not complain. Most of these criticisms I shall, at present, pass by; but one of them seems to me to deserve correction. It is said that the views presented in my previous discourses logically result in the destruction of the church. "If this goes on, we shall have no church," exclaims a devout religionist, and yet if my critic's memory were as acute as his scent for heresy he would have recalled these sentences in the sermon under criticism: "We may now, therefore, safely go on to

say that some form of religion and some form of church will continue to be as long as man continues to be." Again: "The church is," I said a week ago, "because man is. Let me now add the affirmation that so long as man is the church will also be." How it is possible for a critic with these sentences beneath his eye to raise the cry that we shall soon have no church, if this keeps on, is altogether beyond the analysis which I am able to extend to it. It presents a riddle in psychology, the disentangling of which I shall reserve for the retirement of some future vacation.

This criticism, however, really receives its best reply in the announcement of the topic for this morning's discourse, "The Church of the Future." For surely no prophet would undertake to draw an outline of an institution the possibility of which he had, at first, denied. The fancy of a romancer might choose such a task, but for the earnest and serious public teacher there is better work at hand.

Mr. Leslie Stephen said, not long ago, in a magazine article, in speaking of the religious outlook: "In the first place, let us admit freely and frankly that the problem about the religion of the future is simply insoluble"; and a few sentences further on he says: "To predict history is to make a guess with an indefinite chance of error." Now there is in both of these statements, as it seems to me, a modicum of truth and a quantity of error. If one should attempt to picture in detail either the religion or the church of the future, he would probably land in as many incongruities as did our old friend Mr. Pickwick on his midsummer excursion. It would be like attempting to describe all the minute practices of an individual not yet born; and

would result in absurdity. But it is equally absurd to assert, with all the history of race evolution in the past, as a prophecy of what it will be in the future, that no prediction can be safely made as to the possible future of religious dogma and form. I, for one, therefore, will not "frankly and fully admit the future of religion to be insoluble." Its exact conditions few would care to predict, but the general tendency of religious thought and church form may be very well inferred from the signs of the times in which we live.

I take it for granted, for example, that from the very evident lessened authority of creedal statements one may safely infer that the church of the future will be marked by an entire absence of speculative dogma as a basis of agreement. Is it necessary that I attempt to show that even now the creeds are not insisted on as they once were? They are still said in the churches, indeed, but they fall from the lips as an idle tale, and exert little or no influence upon the life. Here and there a priest may by a kind of ecclesiastical gymnastics wriggle his way through the Athanasian creed, but who for an instant supposes that these well-conditioned nineteenth-century men, who go to church to please their wives, or keep up social connections, believe the effete mumblings which they make a show of indorsing? Why, even our friends of the Presbyterian church—whose mild and beautiful creed still evokes the admiration of Christendom (!)—assure us that only ministers are required to swear by the creed, but that laymen slip into the church on a simpler and less extended statement. I do not wish, however to enlarge upon this phase of the subject now; my purpose is rather to expand the inference which I have

already uttered, and attempt to show its reasonableness.

I say the church of the future will be marked by an absence of *speculative beliefs as a basis of agreement.* But what is meant, you will at once ask, by speculative beliefs? I must define the term to mean all beliefs insusceptible of sensible demonstration. Uncertain as phenominal demonstration is, it is at least a vast advance upon the speculations developed from observation of phenomena, or wrought out through the over-active and often diseased imagination of the psychologist or partisan theologian. But let me specify some of the speculative beliefs which I believe will be discarded, at least as articles of agreement, in the future church. The belief in hell is one; the belief in the old theory of inspiration is another; the belief in a personal Deity and the belief in individual immortality are two others.

Hell has already been thrown over by all thoughtful men. That is, the old conception of hell. Conscience, it is true, has made another hell out of remorse for unrighteous conduct; but the old hell, in which souls were to be shut up through eternity by an infinitely merciful God (!), has been very generally relegated to the category of Oriental nightmares. This loss has occasioned but slight regret, even to the conservative—a fact for which we may at least in part account by the relief from all fear which it affords them in regard to their own future. Yet defenders of conservative theology would do well to guard strongly the gates of hell, for when they fall the chief scourge in the hands of the church has lost its lash. Nay! the system then already totters to its fall; for the foundations of

orthodoxy are laid in the bed of hell. It needs no prophet to foretell that men will not be required in the church of the future to accept this horrible dogma.

Nor will they be asked to accept the bible as the infallible word of God. My idea is that the church of the future will no longer tolerate the idea that the Almighty commanded Abraham to cut the throat of an innocent boy. We won't take that defence in the nineteenth century. If we did the poor fanatic of Pocasset would be an illustrious saint, and Guiteau would rank among the world's heroes. The belief in infallible inspiration is purely speculative. It can not be demonstrated. It baffles the analysis of reason, and the future church will no longer require men to accept it. Instead of this, if I may venture a specific prediction, the church will say in regard to the bible, whatever poetic impulse, whatever moral stimulus you can find in the bible, use it as you would use it if found in any other book. In other words, the future church will catalogue the bible as an ancient book, often crude in its composition, but containing many interesting, though not altogether reliable, snatches of history, as well as some most beautiful axioms of morality and tender strains of poetry.

But I must go on to say—in order to be true to myself—that the churchman of the future will not necessarily be a theist. You understand I am simply excluding these ideas as a basis of agreement, and I repeat that while the individual will be permitted to cherish belief in a personal deity, he will not be compelled to do so in order to hold his place in the church of the future. This is so simply

because that church will not insist upon speculative belief as a condition of membership. And the belief in a personal deity, I need not say, is "insusceptible of sensible demonstration." It is an inference satisfactory to one man, but unsatisfactory to his neighbor. In the future, as in the past, men will doubtless still speculate over the beginning of things. Many will adhere to the idea of a great world-soul as the energizing cause of the phenomenal universe. Others will say, as some now say, that if there be a personal God, so-called, he discovers a most amazing indifference to the incessant agony with which this world of ours fairly writhes—but neither the one speculation nor the other will be insisted upon as a basis of agreement.

So also we may safely infer in regard to the immortality of man—it will not be regarded as a belief essential to membership in the church of the future. Friends, may I ask you to acquit me of speaking without feeling on this subject? I am no stranger to the coffin and the grave. I have stood in many homes of darkness; I have wept with mothers over the babes, snatched untimely from their arms. Nay, I have closed forever those eyes out of whose dark and beauteous depths I drank in, as a child, my first lessons of love; and so I may not be charged with approaching this theme destitute of feeling. If I could believe there were a future life, how gladly would I let loose my imagination to picture its possible glories. Not the gentle John himself should beat the air with more eager pinion to reach the gate which I would fain believe opens upon the fields of paradise—than I. But friends, I can not afford to deceive you, and so I say that however beautiful the dream

may be, the chance of its fulfillment seems to me remote and improbable. Science declares at least that for every thought which stirs the brain there is a corresponding molecular change; showing the dependence of thought on matter. Even the boldest defenders of orthodoxy do not attempt to demonstrate the separability of mind and body, and the question of questions for us to decide is, if brain is the organ of mind; nay, if mind depends for its activity on brain action, how will thought go on, how will brain activity continue, when the brain, weary of its ceaseless toil, is laid at last to rest? "The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns" still piques our curiosity, still defies our analysis, and still "puzzles our will." So I say of this, as of the other speculative beliefs enumerated, that they will not be insisted upon as a basis of agreement in the future. Mark the language, as a basis of agreement. I mean by that that the church of the future will include men within its circle whether they profess these beliefs or not. The test of membership will not be speculative philosophy, but practical and natural ethics; and this gives me the opportunity to congratulate this church upon the fact that it has so far anticipated the future as to discard entirely all speculative beliefs as a basis of agreement. No confession of theological correctness has been extorted from the membership of this church. If it had been, some of us would not have entered; if it should be now, many of us would be compelled to leave. Instead of this we ask of a candidate: Has he good character? Is he seeking to promote the best interests of humanity? Can he gain inspiration here to aid him in his daily life? And if these

queries receive affirmative replies the church opens wide its arms to receive him, and so it comes to pass that we have here folks of all theologies and of none, dwelling together, and, as I hope, expecting still to dwell together, in concord and happiness.

Another feature of the future church will be the presence of forms corresponding to the change already described. If the church abandons, as I think it some day will, supernatural theology, it must also abandon supernatural forms, for if it discards the spirit and clings to the form, it will be guilty of a paltry sham. For example, the old idea of prayer is that it can avail to change the course of nature. Through it God is moved to arrest the action of certain laws on one side, and to resort to extraordinary measures on the other. Now, as the idea gains ground that effect follows cause in natural sequence, that the action of natural law is marked by an inevitability and invariability which knows no deflection, so the attempt to upset the course of events by individual petition will be abandoned. Believing this most thoroughly myself, I have abandoned petitional prayer. I do not believe it avails aught, and I have never been more happy in my life than since I surrendered any semblence of petition, and, instead, simply closed my eyes to commune with my own best and tenderest thoughts.* And, moreover, there will grow up in the church of the future other and widely different forms of expression. The old phrases—no longer meaningful, whether in sermon, in hymn book, or in scripture—will be eschewed, and others corresponding to the exact thought of the age will be used.

* See Appendix.

This change will be slow, but it will be as sure as the evolution of the race into nobler conditions and more accurate conceptions is inevitable. To doubt this is worse than cowardice. It is skepticism of the worst and rankest kind. It simply means that we question the ability of future generations to do that which past generations have done—namely, express their own best thought about the universe, in its origin and continuance; about man, his nature and possibilities, in their own language. In other words, it is to despair of the honesty and acuteness of our own posterity—the worst form of pessimism in which one can possibly indulge.

I wish now to go forward in the direction of some other characteristics which I believe the future church will surely possess. In doing this I shall attempt nothing more than outline drawing; the filling in of the picture will be the task of other minds. You remember how glowingly Sir Thomas More pictures the ideal condition of society under the name of Utopia. He called it Utopia from the Greek words *ou* and *Topos*, which mean nowhere, and yet many of the conditions which he described as elements in his ideal society have already become parts of our civilization. One ideal condition which he pictured was an entire absence from his city of all lawyers—a point in race evolution, alas! to which we have not yet attained! But the remarkable thing about More's Utopia as compared with modern society is, that in many respects the actual outshines the imagined, and the realities of today are more gorgeous than the sanguine conceptions of the old romancer. So I am sure that whatever I may say of the future of the church will

fall short of the glorious future which is in fact before it.

First of all its ideal and motive will be goodness. I mean by goodness the conduct which builds up and makes happy the individual, as over against the conduct which deteriorates and eventually makes miserable the individual; the conduct which results in the best social aggregate as compared with the conduct which rends society apart, sows the seeds of distrust, of anarchy, and of crime. The church of the future will aim to inspire men with admiration for this style of life. It will not go to hell for a motive, nor to heaven; it will neither bribe with a sugar plum nor drive with a whip, but it will simply hold up two motives. One, the motive of experience. It will show the men of that day that in so far as men of the past have held to the right, to the good, to the true, and the beautiful they have been happy, unless some external cause indeed has arisen to disturb and overthrow their happiness. It will show that in so far as men have been base and unworthy, they have been miserable at heart, though apparently happy. It will by experience prove that the latter conduct destroys, while the former develops and builds up society, and so its second motive will be the future of the race. Unworthy counselors will tell you that this is but a worthless motive; but listen to this voice:

> O, may I join the choir invisible
> Of those immortal dead who live again
> In minds made better by their presence; live
> In pulses stirred to generosity,
> In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
> Of miserable aims that end with self,
> In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,

> And with their mild persistence urge men's minds
> To vaster issues.
> So to live is heaven.

And listening to that voice, tell me is it no glory to you worth striving for that your efforts today and tomorrow after essential goodness, besides adding to your own peace, will contribute something toward the glory of the future? Let me but think I am helping to make this world more habitable for future generations, and the thought will inspire me in life and sustain my spirit when my last hour draws near. Such, then, will be the ideal and the motive of the future church, but besides this, or rather as the natural outgrowth of this, the future church will assume other conditions, which if it has at all now, are at best only in embryonic form. It will be the central philanthropic force of society. I like that word "philanthropic." How much it means *the love of man*, and this indeed will be the attitude of the future church. I do not discount what the church has done, what it is doing, but I do say that as it lays less stress upon speculation and dogmatic controversy, it will have both more time and energy to devote to practical philanthropy. It will help men then because they need help, and not because they are sectaries of this stripe or of that. If I may again, with propriety, refer to this church, it has set the pattern for the future church in its work among the poor children of this city, whom it washes, and combs, and dresses, and teaches, without so much as lisping religion or church. Such a course is a forerunner of the practical philanthropy of the future church.

The church of the future, too, I think, will be a social

center in society. It will draw men together in pleasant, helpful, loving relations. Their association will not depend on theologic agreement, but upon human sympathy. Based on the great fact of human dependence, they will be drawn together by community of purpose, of aspiration, and of sentiment. The church then will not decry social enjoyments from the pulpit, and practise them in the parlor. No. It will say to the young: "Be happy, be innocent, be gay, be moderate, and above all be true!" And beyond all the church of the future will be a great educative and formative force in society. It will teach men to think. To think not for purposes of acute criticism, but that they may be builders in society. It will gather its young together for comparison of views, it will group them in helpful association, provide for them healthful amusements, and so seek to ennoble and glorify their best life. The minister of the future, though called by some other name, perhaps, will be one to whom every lad and lass will come with his or her tale of woe, to seek here a word of comfort and there a word of guidance and advice. Such, I think, will be some of the conditions of my ecclesiastical Utopia. Such is the vision which I dimly see, and to which I would direct your eyes. Do you smile at my credulity? Do you say such social conditions could not exist without a dogmatic basis?

Do you ask: "Where is that city
  Where the perfect right doth reign?
I must answer, I must tell you,
  That you seek its sight in vain.

You may roam o'er hill and valley,

You may pass o'er land and sea,
You may search the wide earth over,
'Tis a city yet to be.

But when it comes—when the vision beautiful of a perfected society, freed from superstition, from priestcraft, from the horrible spell of false philosophy, breaks upon the world, then methinks at least that prophecy of the Apocalypse will be true which pictures a condition of society in which "there shall be no more death" (because death shall have lost its terror!), "neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain," for the former things are passed away.

THE MASTERY OF LOVE.

Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.—John, xiii., 1.

THE picture of Jesus of Nazareth which the New Testament contains is imperfect and unsatisfactory in many essential respects. It presents but a brief period of his life, and even that is depicted in a fragmentary manner. Not to speak of the very generally recognized uncertainty of their authorship and date, the New Testament writings are so replete with Oriental mysticism and manifest exaggerations, that one needs to pick his way carefully through them in order to discriminate between fact and fancy, or separate narrative genuine, from manufactured history. And when one has done this, when he has with painstaking study divided the interpolation of later days from the earlier and more valuable account, when he has, with as much deliberation as possible, drawn a line between the mythical and the actual, he is still forced to turn away from the subject with sincere regret that so noble a life as that of the great Nazarene had not been more accurately delineated. And yet the thoughtful reader can not, if he would, and would not were he able, avoid the reflection that back of this shadow picture there must have been one of the most extraordinary personalities, and, in many ways,

the most remarkable life, which human history records.

And, moreover, amidst all the mist by which that unique figure is surrounded, we catch occasional gleams of light, which go far toward illuminating the surrounding darkness. Such is the significent passage which I have just read to you. It throws a light so tender and so beautiful upon the figure of Jesus that were it the only thing written of him our admiration would be evoked, and our sensibilities charmed. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." These words express to us as plainly as language can, the mastery of genuine love over all hindrances contained in its object, and upon that mastery I would fain concentrate your thought at this hour.

Let us consider at once just what this mastery meant in the case of Jesus. "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end." Was there then anything particularly noble and love-compelling in "his own"; were they especially free from the foibles which men usually possess; did love meet with no hindrances in them; that it ran so smoothly and so persistently on its way? Far from it. Probably love—the love of one man for other men—never encountered more weakness and more unlovely characteristics than the love of Jesus met and conquered in the personalities of his immediate disciples. Their ambitions were ill-directed, their purposes fluctuating, their affections easily turned aside. Dreams of prominence and power to be enjoyed when their master came into his kingdom alternated with fears of what might be in reserve for them in case he, like many before him, should be proved an adventurer

and destroyed. They doubted him today; tomorrow, some magnetic word from his lips restored their confidence. Now they were seized with a spasm of rash enthusiasm, again their hopes and their purposes drooped as the wing of a wounded bird. Peter, the boldest and the most cowardly by turns, certainly afforded the love of Jesus many an obstacle to surmount, many an unlovely characteristic to overcome. Listen to his ill-considered boast. Their leader is looking calmly into the future, he has counted the cost of his own conduct, he knew full well that no man could stand up against the current of popular thought and practice as he had and escape the fate of all reformers; and as he looks onward to his own hastening fate, he says: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." But Peter, yielding to a gust of generous emotion, exclaims: "Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." And so no doubt he thought, for we must not learn to doubt the temporary genuineness of very much human affection, from which the quality of continuity is entirely absent. But Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. He knew how easily most men bow down before the popular current, and so gloomily predicts that the very night on which the boast was made, shall not give way to succeeding day, until his impulsive follower has thrice denied him. And how true his prediction proved. We lift the curtain from the judgment hall, and the scene sends sadness to our heart that human affection is so easily turned aside. A saucy-eyed girl, by

a thoughtless jest, brings the denying oath to Peter's lips which has since served as the synomym of human vacillation and treachery. He denied his master to cursing and swearing. Nor if we gaze for an instant at the vanishing figures of the other disciples, are we able to discern a single sign of that loyalty which knows "no variableness nor shadow of turning?" "They forsook him and fled."

We must not linger upon this scene too long, however. The glimpse we have taken is sufficient to show us that had Jesus been an ordinary man, he would have at once forsworn natures so weak and so cowardly. But Jesus was not an ordinary man; for through all their perfidy and cowardice, and notwithstanding all their obtuseness, "he loved them unto the end." To Peter, who had so recently sworn to stand by him to the last, and who so bitterly denied him, he only looked his mingled sadness and rebuke. Surely, friends, a nature capable of such a mastery over resentment, over disappointed affection, is one which we may with justice characterize as extraordinary.

We shall turn, then, with growing interest to an attempt to discover the real secret of affection so unusual, of love so enduring, as that which Jesus bore for "his own." For there must be in such love some unusual quality which lifts it above, and makes it superior to that common thing called love, which may be thrown aside as readily, and as easily, as a worn-out glove. What is that quality? I think it is the quality of discrimination; the ability to separate *between the ideal possibility and the poor actuality* of the ordinary mortal. This ability, joined with the quality of loyalty, it is, I think, which enables such natures as the one

we are considering, to triumph, in their loves, over all temporary impediments, and persist through all discouragements unto the very end. I think it was Coleridge who said: "Love is the admiration and cherishing of the amiable qualities of the beloved person." To this I would add that love descries and feeds itself upon the germinal forms of amiable qualities in the person beloved. It separates the wheat from the chaff, not only upon the barn floor, but also prospectively in the field of ripening grain. Love is not blind—it is keen sighted! It sees that which is seen by no other eyes! It hopes that which is hoped by no other heart! In a word: "It beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and so it never faileth."

And I believe that the possession, or the absence, of this discriminating ability, which enables one to distinguish between the ideal possibility and the present actual, in others, will go further than to produce loyalty in personal relations. It will largely determine the spirit and temper with which one looks out upon the great mystery of human existence. Without it, one must land in pessimism. Let a man close his eyes entirely to the ideal promise that is in men, let him look every day upon the wretched actual, and he will soon learn to swear by the apostle Schopenhauer. He will see them weak where they should be strong. He will see them cowards where they should be brave. He will observe the craftiness of the duplicity with which they cheat themselves. He will see them playing fast and loose with their own holiest emotions. He will hear the sneer with which they drown divine enthusiasm.

He will see them lead Jesus to the cross, while they call Herod a God! His eye will dwell upon the coarse brutalities of life till it becomes dull to all finer vision. To him the world is one vast hospital, religion a mockery, ideal humanity a sneer. Till at last he comes to feel as the great German philosopher who congratulated his infant son, who died a few days after birth, upon his good sense in at once turning his back upon so harsh a world.

On the other hand, when one possesses that fineness of love, that keenness of vision which enables him to go back of the poor actual to the ideal possibility, nay, to the present, but concealed, virtue, then he will be an optimist. He will not, indeed, be blind to the darker phases of existence. But deploring that which he can not avert, he will steadily look upon the brighter and better side of things. Even in things evil, he will find a soul of good. The curse of Peter will not entirely banish from his thought the generous oath of fealty. The cowardly flight of the frightened disciples will not render him forgetful of the many hours during which those wayward feet had followed his footsteps through the wanderings of his itinerant ministry. Nay, more; he will in the very midst of sin and weakness detect some quality, some virtue, which will make him persist in his love. This man will see beauty where others see it not. He will call nothing common or unclean. His hope will glorify the future of humanity, his love redeem its present! There is something of this spirit, I think, though it is terribly discounted by his unfortunate small clothes, in Oscar Wilde. He may carry it to extremes which are absurd; some folks say he

does, but inasmuch as he is able to find the bright and the beautiful wherever the bright and the beautiful may be found, he has caught one of the secrets—perhaps the great secret—of happy and hopeful living.

I wish, however, to insist somewhat upon the quality of loyalty, which is always present in genuine love. The quality which made Jonathan true to David, according to the bible-story, in his darkest hour; the quality which glorifies the friendship of Damon and Pythias; the quality which Dickens pictured so inimitably in that rude fisherman, Mr. Peggoty, who left all behind that he might go forth to seek and reclaim the wandering feet of "little Emily;" the quality so beautifully conspicuous in that vow of Ruth to the desolate Naomi: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried."

I have already accounted for the immediate cause of this quality, in speaking of the discriminating vision which begets it. Let me now point out to you its effects. Take first the case of Jesus. You know the gospel-story represents Jesus as rising to life after three days of death. I understand that most of you believe that tale, and while I myself do not, I can at least refer to it for the purpose of adding emphasis to this truth. You will remember that after his alleged resurrection Jesus is represented as mingling lovingly with his disciples as though all the past were blotted out. Well, it seems to me that had Jesus been

indeed reanimated that is just the course he would have taken. His love would have conquered all! Would he then have forgotten the curse? No. For the human brain is not so easily or so happily rid of its memories. But he would have beaten down the thought of Peter's treachery by the thought of Peter's sorrow; nay, he would have washed away his treachery with the impulsive disciples' penitential tears. In other words, I do not suppose that Jesus would have turned his back upon Peter under any circumstances. He was "not of that feather to shake off his friends when they most needed him." Most "men shut their doors against a setting sun," but Jesus—if indeed the quality ascribed to him were really his—would but have been the intenser in his love, the truer in his devotion, if the hour of weakness or necessity had come to his wavering follower. Or if we take an instance nearer home we may quite as forcibly set forth the effect of this loyalty and discrimination. For months past the country has been looking toward a court-room at Washington with loathing and detestation. With one accord the public press has demanded the execution of Guiteau, and never before, perhaps, has a criminal on trial excited the anger and the contempt visited upon Garfield's murderer. But through all, with a sisterly loyalty worthy of true womanhood, Mrs. Scoville has sat by his side "faithful unto death." Some have ventured to condemn her for this loyalty, but to my mind she could have rendered no grander tribute to woman's nature than by the course she pursued. This is a triumph of true love. Back of the murderer—red-handed and truculent—that true woman saw, it may be, the

picture of a smiling child, innocent and happy; back of the hardened criminal, nay, in him now, her eyes may have seen what other eyes have failed to see—a gleam of better life, and because love "hopeth all things and never faileth," she has been as true to that felon as woman's heart can be. I need not multiply such illustrations. They suggest themselves at once to every mind. The romancist builds upon them his fascinating tale, and from the sterner record of our daily life—let us joyously say—they are not altogether absent.

But besides being at the foundation of loyalty in personal relations, besides begetting hopefulness in the very presence of despair, I think we may safely say that the ability to discriminate, to see into the essential nature of things, to separate the temporary phase from the permanent fact in truth, is the quality which makes one *loyal to the truth as he sees it*, at whatever cost it may be. It made the great Nazarene loyal to the truth in spite of the infuriated mob. It made Wesley loyal, in spite of the sneers of the Established Church. It made Theodore Parker loyal in the face of the ostracism of the New-England Unitarians. And it was back of those heroic words uttered by the monk of Wittenberg at the diet of Worms: "Here I stand; I can do no other." And it does this simply through its clearness of vision, by which it enables one to detect and adhere to the permanent rather than the temporary.

Others may boldly go forward to limit the infinite, to imprison in terms of personality that all-pervasive force which lies back of all phenomena, a denial of which is tantamount to a denial of sanity. But if one's thought has

once stood in awe before the mystery of being; if he has once seen the folly of ascribing a finite name to an infinite essence, he will still reverently refuse, with the ancient Hebrew, to articulate a name for so incomprehensible and so unknowable a force. And having reached this ground, he will stand upon it to the end. Others may affirm a fact of which none can know; they may rashly talk as though already they had journeyed to the "undiscovered country" and surveyed its dimensions, but he—though he may span the graves of his own dead with the radiant bow of hope—will not assert that which lies beyond all reach of demonstration. He will confess that if the candle of life is again rekindled in some other sphere, he has at least no proof of it, and therefore can not assert it. Nor do I think men should take great credit to themselves for the loyalty to truth which this clearness of vision begets. It is simply the doing of one's duty to stand by his own sincerest conviction, and with a sincere soul there can be no debate on such a subject. But to cherish a conviction, and because of the hue and cry of the populace, desert it—this, indeed, should for ever stamp one as a traitor and a coward.

And now, in closing, let me commend to you all this thrice noble quality which the text attributes to Jesus Christ—loyalty in love. Be loyal in your loves whether they be for individuals, or for those more abstract but equally precious things—principles. Know that with the approbation of your own highest nature you may be serene and happy, with all the world against you; but that, having proved traitor to yourself, the applause of multitudes will fall upon your ears as the mocking laughter of fiends. I

hold up to you this admirable quality—attributed to Jesus—as I hold up before you every other noble trait which is associated with his name—and say if to be such a man is to be a Christian, be one. If to accept as divinely inspired the New Testament, if to believe in the immaculate conception of Jesus, if to accept the theory of a commercial atonement, if to accept the tale of the resurrection, and of all other miracles, is to be a Christian, then I have no right to that name. But if to imitate whatever is admirable in Jesus, if to be kind to the poor, merciful to the fallen, true to one's convictions, loyal to one's friends, and if to stand against the forces which destroy men and for the forces which develop their noblest life, looking ever into the future for humanity's golden age, if this is to be a Christian, then I still crave the privilege to be numbered among the followers of the Judean peasant.

LAST WORDS IN THE PULPIT.

SINCE we last met here, it has been, by yourselves, decided that we shall not meet here again. The resolution passed at your meeting of February 13th, instructing the trustees to notify me that my services must terminate at the expiration of three months, coupled with the ingenious suggestion that the same officers be empowered to grant me a vacation during those three months, renders it quite impossible, of course, for me to ever again address this congregation upon any terms whatever. And I only appear before you this morning for the purpose of placing on record my conception of the causes which have led to the abrupt termination of my relations with this Church. I do this in justice to myself, as well as to the many friends throughout this country who, during the past trying weeks, have sustained me with their sympathetic words, and who feel my wound as though it were their own.

I wish to avoid the utterance of any harsh or unseemly word in what I have to say at this time, and if any tinge of acerbity creeps into this address, no one will regret it more sincerely than myself. This desire, I confess, is not born of the conviction that this congregation, since the 13th of February, deserves such consideration on my part, but rather of the feeling that justice to my own better self,

as well as to the cause I represent, requires the suppression of every thing malicious and vindictive. I remember, and will act upon, Hamlet's charge to Polonius in reference to the entertainment of the actors:

> *Hamlet.* Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed?
>
> *Polonius.* My lord, I will use them according to their desert.
>
> *Hamlet.* God's bodykins, man, much better! Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity; the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.

As I stand here today, and realize that it is the last time I shall ever speak to you, I can not suppress a feeling of astonishment at the suddenness of the proceeding which has led to this separation. It is not yet six weeks since I here uttered that address upon the "Church of the Future" which has excited so much virulent, and so little intelligent, criticism. It seems indeed but yesterday that I listened to the pleasant congratulations of the congregation over my determination to remain in this pulpit; and today the same hands which then clasped mine in the warmth of friendship are eager to wave me a none too friendly farewell. Surely a change so swift and so complete may be traced to a cause most emphatic, or to a mistake most egregious.

Before attempting to show the cause of this revulsion of feeling, I wish to explain the circumstances connected with my resignation and its subsequent withdrawal—which have been so generally misunderstood. On the 15th of October, 1881, I addressed a letter to the leading trustee of this church, telling him I wished to be released from this pulpit, and giving as one reason for that desire my

conviction that I was too far in advance of the congregation in my philosophical position, and that we had, therefore, better separate. The gentleman to whom I addressed that letter, urged delay, and I yielded to his wish. In December of 1881, however, I renewed the request for release from my duties in this pulpit. In the letter then written, I did not mention my theological position, because on consultation with leading men in the congregation it was considered best to leave that unmentioned. You will remember that just at that time the religious (?) papers of the country were gloating over the fact that Mr. Frothingham had forever rendered the advance of rational religion impossible by a supposed recantation. And I wished to quietly withdraw from my position without furnishing the religious (!) editors any further material for their poorly written misrepresentations. In response to the letter I have mentioned, a committee was appointed to wait upon me, and induce me to withdraw the resignation just offered. At the interview which followed, I plainly described my theological position as "ultra" and "radical"; spoke of myself as a disciple of Herbert Spencer's in philosophy; and said, "if I withdraw this resignation you will ask me for it again within a year." Reply was made, that "I was not aware how radical the congregation was." But we separated without any intimation on my part that I would withdraw the resignation. After this another committee was appointed, and this committee again urged me to remain here. I told them emphatically, that I considered myself "too radical" for the place, but it was urged that the con-

gregation too was progressive in its tendencies, and that I had better stay. I thereupon withdrew the resignation, and in my announcement to the congregation, on the ensuing Sunday, said that I had become convinced that I might henceforth "utter the utmost truth to which my mind might reach." The facts here recorded are simply irrefragable. And one month after they had transpired, I was abruptly and harshly notified that my services were no longer needed. Let us now seek the cause of this swift revolution in the mind of the congregation. It is easy to conceive of circumstances which would justify such treatment. Had I suddenly taken to stealing overcoats; or had I announced that the late Brigham Young's family relations were ideal; or that gambling was, in point of fact, the finest flower of our civilization; the abruptness of this Society's method in dismissing me would have been entirely justifiable. But no! No man has arisen to charge me with abating "one jot or tittle" of the moral code which governs our modern life. Whatever builds up noble manhood, whatever enshrines the virtue of women, whatever preserves—unstrained and sacred the hearthstone—I have taught with all the emphasis of my nature. We must then look elsewhere for the cause of this action now under discussion. And here I may say that when I asked the Society to furnish me with a reason for its action, it absolutely refused to do so. Lawyers arose to inform me that it was not

"So nominated in the bond,"

that my contract called for the giving of no reason, and that the Society proposed simply to

"Stand upon its bond."

That the contract indeed called for no reason, I very well knew, but I had supposed, foolishly enough, I now see, that a society of Christians might take a broader view than that of mere technicality, that it might recall some old lines about the "long suffering of charity," about going forth "into the wilderness" after "the lost sheep;" and when I found a church-meeting disposed to fall back upon those technicalities which a railroad corporation would instinctively employ in contesting some trivial cow case or personal injury, I could not avoid recalling this magnificent strain:

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

Nor could I resist a disposition to contrast my own conduct when asked by the society for a reason for my resignation, which I most freely and unreservedly gave, with the conduct of the society in so curtly refusing my request. Others said that it was "quite impossible for the society to give a reason for its action," this too from a society composed of intelligent people, accustomed generally to assign a reason for their actions in the daily affairs of life. This statement, however, was regarded by thoughtful men throughout the country as a bit of quiet irony, and I will not be guilty of reviving a stale joke. I am obliged, therefore, to imagine a cause. Having asked for one in vain of those who only could give it, I must look into the nature of all the circumstances and find one for myself.

And when I do this, I am driven to the conclusion that the reason of my displacement from this pulpit, lies in the

fact of my unambiguous use of the English language. I have inherited, from my mother, I think, a most detestable habit of calling a spade—a spade! This is unfortunate in the pulpit. Especially in the pulpit of a liberal church. The language of diplomacy, of expediency, of policy,—a kind of phraseology which I do most cordially hate—answers the purpose better. I have in "my mind's eye," at this moment, a Sunday lecturer in this City who has achieved distinction in this kind of phraseologic jugglery.

He is oh! so eloquent in talking of Socrates; but instead of pronouncing himself as a man upon any vital question of the day, he wriggles along on the top of the fence, and never lands on either side till all other travelers have alighted. The Halifax of the pulpit! A natural trimmer and twister of words, who sustains himself with the orthodox by frequent indulgence in their favorite adjectives and nouns, and keeps in with the heretics by occasional, wisely-timed, excursions into the domain of rationalism! Unfortunately for me, as some may think, but most fortunately in my own judgment, it has been found quite impossible to teach me this highly useful art. Word-twisting I am not skilled in! There is no use attempting to conceal that fact. I have always announced my convictions in the pulpit. I have not supposed that my work was that of hoodwinking the people, but of leading them away from superstitions into the clear and blessed light of Reason. I understand that the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher—for whom I have always cherished a sincere regard—has recently said that a *minister* should not tell the people all he knows. That, he says, is just the difference between a minister and

a professor! Well, I have been wishing ever since I heard that remark, that Princeton would call Mr. Beecher to the chair of systematic theology (!), so that the world might once find out all he believes! As a professor, he could tell it all, you know. Now to me, any such sophism as that is thoroughly contemptible. "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," is in my judgment the formula for the pulpit. And loyalty to that formula is the cause of my exclusion from this pulpit. For does any one doubt that many ministers in the pulpits and thousands of laymen in the pews entertain views similar to those expressed in my address on the church of the future? The only difference between us being that I have spoken of a spade as a spade, while others denominate it "an implement for disturbing the crust of the earth!"

If we examine the present status of theological parties to day we will find at least three pretty distinct classes; first, the Supernaturalists, or those who accept without modification all the miraculous claims of the new testament; second, the Rationalists, or those who give to reason the supreme place, in religion as in everything else; and third, the Nondescripts, or those who play fast and loose with the two parties just mentioned. Let us look at the respective positions of these three classes for a little while.

The position of the Supernaturalists, it is not easy to mistake. Commencing with a mystical foundation for their religious theories, their entire theological castle is built in the air. Beginning with the assumption of an infallible book they end with the assumption of a physical

and exclusive heaven. Their grotesque story of the fall of man is only equalled by their fantastic picture of his ultimate exaltation. In a word, their whole position is described when we say that they postulate as demonstrable facts, dogmas whose only foundation is mysticism

"The bible and the bible only," said one of their number, "is the religion of Protestants." Now at the time when the yoke of a corrupt church was grinding men's souls and bodies alike in the dust, to exchange an infallible church for an infallible book was doubtless a step in the right direction. An ecclesiastical tyrant in flesh and blood could inflict tortures more terrible than any ill effects which might proceed from the various interpretations of ancient manuscripts, however sacred they might be. No wonder then that lovers of human liberty hailed the change of authority with manifestations of delight. But now how different it all seems. Doctrines contradictory to human reason, and repugnant to human sensibility, are evolved from these time-worn documents, and enforced as relentlessly, if not as bloodily, as any papal bull or council's edict in the by-gone days.

It is from this source that the doctrine of a personal deity has been so confidently deduced. Commencing with the ancient Hebrew, who, in his strifes with the predatory tribes of the desert, always vainly supposed God to be on his side, the attributes of personality have been promiscuously and irreverently ascribed to that unseen and unknowable force which lies back of all phenomena, and the existence of which none of us deny. "The Lord is a *man* of war—the Lord is his name," exclaimed the exultant

Jew, and ever since they who have accepted as infallibly inspired the old and new testaments have kept up the same cry, with trifling modifications. Nor do I find it difficult to account for the genesis of this attempt to picture, under the terms of personality, the energizing principle of nature. The highest thing known to primitive man was his own nature; he therefore magnified that nature, and thus made a personal God. Every man's God is himself exaggerated! That is if he clings to the conception of a personal deity.

So also was the devil originated. Men saw the malevolent workings of nature, and they attributed them to the agency of a person. All this is easy to conceive as an operation of the crude speculations of primitive man. But when we come to an age of reason, it is difficult to understand why men should so desperately cling to these notions. And their inconsistency in doing so is indeed remarkable. For instance, a year ago, in this pulpit, I clearly abandoned the idea of a personal devil, and there was not a ripple of excitement. No one was sad when I announced that the devil was dead—no one put on mourning. In good truth, I thought at the time some of the brethren seemed to be relieved! I said then, "the only devil in the universe is evil, eliminate evil and the devil is dead!" Now, a child can see that the antithesis of a *personal* devil is a *personal* God, and that logically the two ideas stand or fall together. But when I come to say that it is irreverent and rash to limit the mysterious force which underlies all life by the terms of human personality, then those who raised no objection to the removal of a personal devil cry out in holy horror! Alas! for their logical acumen!

Another position which is based on the reception of an infallible book, is that of the vicarious atonement; and still another is the doctrine of a hell and a heaven in which the evil and the good are to spend eternity. Now, if one accepts the premise of an infallible book, supernaturally originated, I for one do not see how he can dodge any of these doctrines. If the bible says, "God is a man," why then he is a man! If the bible says "the devil has hoofs" —undoubtedly he has hoofs! If the bible says that "for so much blood a certain number of folks are going to escape hell"—then, doubtless, that also is true! In a word it is consistent, having accepted the infallible book, to accept without qualification any nonsense which it may be found to contain.

I call your attention to these additional facts which are part of the system of the Supernaturalists. First, morality is made to depend upon a reception of these doctrines. In a word, they are made the only basis of morality. "Do away with a personal God," exclaims the Supernaturalist, "and you have no basis for morality left!" As though the distinctions between right and wrong depended upon any theological dogma whatever. Second, the chief motives for human conduct are drawn from these improbable dogmas. I do not exaggerate when I say that the burden of ordinary preaching is "be bad and you'll go to hell! be good and you'll go to heaven!" Teaching so utterly immoral and unworthy that I find no language sufficiently strong with which to condemn it. And so destructive, I may add, of all the finest instincts of men, that until such teaching is displaced by purer ethical instruction, no

very swift advance need be expected in the morality of our race.

Such in brief is the position of the Supernaturalists. An angry God is in their heaven. A pleading God is by his side. A miraculous book explains not only the anger of the first but the pleading of the second. An atonement has been made through blood. Some souls through its mystic power will be lifted to the glory of the New Jerusalem; while others will pass into intolerable and unending anguish. Such is the system of Calvin, in all its diluted forms; such the beauty of the God it offers for our worship; such is the horrible prospect it displays over every grave. How strange then that fatuity which leads men to simulate enthusiasm for a God whose garments are stained with blood, and to long for a heaven which is to be the eternal opposite of a bottomless hell! And yet there is a logical consistency in this system which our friends of the Nondescript persuasion entirely lack. Admit its premise and how will you escape its conclusions? Given the book which can not err, and it were blasphemy indeed to question its teachings—however grotesque or horrible they may be!

It is from bondage to this horrible nightmare of the middle ages, that I—in common with many others—would liberate the human mind; and in order to do this, we find it necessary to cut loose from the entire system. Do not mistake me. We do not renounce all religion, but we project a new meaning into the word. To us, religion no longer means the holding of a set of mystical ideas upon speculative subjects; it means, instead, enthusiasm for

noble morality, for exalted goodness, and it has for its aim the production of right social relations, and the idealization of the human race. To this position I have come, not suddenly, as some say, but as the result of long-and-painstaking study. For years the trend of my thoughts has been in this direction.

This is the religion of the Agnostics. It is not mere negation. It is rather a more glorious and more definite positive than any boasted by the old systems. Men who stand where I stand, may at least claim the merit of consistency. We postulate as parts of our system only demonstrable facts. When asked to define ourselves in regard to deity, we say "in the nature of things no definition can be given!" We indeed regard the attempt to limit the energizing principle of the universe by terms of human personality as contradictory and irreverent. "Contradictory" because all our conceptions of personality are formed from our knowledge of finite persons; and to carry up these conceptions, and attribute them to that which is infinite, is essentially absurd. It is often said that if we would think of a God at all, we must think of him as possessing the attributes of personality—that is, we must carry up our own characteristics and attribute them to him. But to me, this process of reasoning is extremely weak. For I find that after this has been done, it is confessed that no satisfactory conception of the divine nature has been reached, and I ask why not stop before setting out upon so futile a task? All we can do is to throw our own nature on the canvas—magnify it—and call it God. And yet we are finite and limited. Who then is most reverent—he who

thus rashly gives a name to the unnameable—he who thus describes the indescribable—he who thus limits the illimitable—he who pretends to analize the unknowable—or he who confesses himself but a babe in the face of so great a mystery, and bids his tongue cease its idle prattling on the threshold of the infinite? Let it be understood that we make no rash denial of a force which permeates the universe, a force which sways the planets and paints the petal of the opening rosebud, a force which animates with myriad-fold life this ball on which we live and spangles the "majestical roof" above with its glory of "golden fire," a force which lends sweetness to the song of birds and flashes in the love-lit eyes of youth, a force which girdles the earth with light as with a garment and stretches its mystic wand to the uttermost limits of space!—to deny this we have already said were evidence of an unsound mind, and I, for one, have never denied it. But having made this confession, we refuse to be driven into the incongruity of limiting with human conditions and human terms that which baffles our closest thought and defies our keenest inspection. And I hold such deference is essentially more reverential than the presumption of a man who glibly applies to this mysterious force his own pet names.

But in regard to other points of supernatural theology, we take far different ground. The doctrine of a vicarious atonement we hold in derision as a scheme unworthy of just men, and certainly unworthy of a just God. The picture of one God bribing another is so grotesque, that with difficulty we suppress our ridicule. We admire the lofty

personality of Jesus. As for myself, I can truly say that never from these lips has one word of irreverence escaped in speaking of that noble man. His magnificent enthusiasm, his quick-springing sympathy, his moral fervor, his poetic appreciation of the beautiful and the noble, together with the undertone of pathos in his nature, which made him swift to dry all tears, as well as charitable to the meanest and the most brutal, have always charmed my sensibilities and compelled my admiration! But the idea that he died to change the attitude of an infinite being toward the inhabitants of this planet is so incongruous, that I am amazed at the credulity of those who accept it. A God who could consent to the suffering of so pure and lofty a man in behalf of men unworthy and criminal, is himself immoral, and needs saving! The conception of the atonement ordinarily dealt out from orthodox pulpits, is exploded and obsolete in the judgment of thinking men, and this is the reason that so few really thoughtful men are found in the churches where it is wearily reiterated.

And when we come to the question of Eschatology, of the future state of human beings, we at once denounce as absurd the supernatural representations of heaven and hell, and confess ourselves as totally ignorant upon the whole subject. The idea of a local heaven with pavements laid in gold, and foundation stones of jewelry, is as fancifully improbable as the picture of an eternal hell is unlikely and brutal. It is not illogical, however, if you once accept the conception of a God who can partially select soəm of his children to be glorified and leave others to be damned. With such a God on the summit of Olympus, any Tartarus

is possible! But against this God and this hell we protest with equal vehemence. To make any person responsible for the *present* brutalities of this world, is bad enough;—but to project these agonies across the infinite waste of eternal years; to magnify every pain that tortures a human soul, till it be adequate to eternal time; to perpetuate every wail of anguish that escapes from human lips, and make it of everlasting duration; to think of Dives as forever calling in vain to Abraham for the end of a finger dipped in water to relieve his thirst, and then point to a smiling God in the centre of the universe as the author of it all; why, this is nothing less than to enthrone an incarnate devil, and to elevate Mephistopheles as monarch of the universe!

The immorality of an eternal hell should brand every man who teaches it as being himself immoral. At any rate I have this to say, that from a God who could make possible such a hereafter, I would turn away in loathing and contempt! I recall at this moment the memory of my mother: "She was a woman! take her for all in all, I shall not look upon her like again?" How swift her sympathies, how magnificent her scorn, how loyal her friendship, how noble and complete her enmity, how tender her love, and how gentle her charity, the mildness of the stars and the brilliance of the sun beamed from her beautiful eyes; —and yet if the orthodox theology be true, that woman, upon whose bosom I leaned as a babe, is now in hell; for she never felt the necessity of joining any church. And I deliberately say to you, that if there is a God in this universe mean enough to damn that woman, I want him to damn me too—for I still wish to keep my mother's company!

Heaven and hell are antithetical terms here or hereafter, and while I would teach men to be honest, and true, and brave, and loving, that they may live in heaven here, I would also say, in regard to the future 'I know nothing.' Here let me quote the corroborating language of Bishop Foster, of the M.-E. Church, who says:

However it may awaken surprise, truth demands that we should make the confession that we do not know that death does not end all. * * We have neither sense nor mental vision of man after he dies. He does not appear again within the range of our faculties. We do not find him. Where he is, or that he is at all, is absolutely unknown to us. Our consciousness is silent on the subject. The dead do not come back to us, and we are not able to go to them. This without doubt is the common experience of humanity.

To those who confidently predict a future existence for the soul of man, I again propose the demonstration of the separability of mind and body. Prove that, and I am convinced.

But the cry is raised that such views destroy the basis of morality, and we are asked, what incentive will you now offer men for right action? If you can not bribe them with heaven, or frighten them with hell, what influence will you bring to bear on them? And again we fall back upon our original position, and say we will only postulate as parts of our system demonstrable facts. We will not journey to ghostland for motives. We will say, and say emphatically, that there *is* such a thing as right conduct, and there *is* such a thing as wrong conduct. In other words, we will fall back upon the existence of that distinction between right and wrong, out of which has been evolved the objective personal devil, and the objective per-

sonal God. We deny the personality, but we recognize the existence of an ideal evil and an ideal good in the universe. And then as an incentive to the individual to strive after the attainment of this ideal, we will point out, first, its intrinsic beauty; second, the fact of its beneficial effect upon the race; and third, the fact that only by the subjugation of all evil, and the universal sway of ideal good, will humanity reach its golden age, and dwell indeed in Paradise! Before going forward to a brief survey of the position of the nondescripts, the third party of which I spoke, I wish to reply to the criticism, that the Agnostic position which I have just attempted to describe, is not worthy the name of *religion*. As it seems to me, that depends very much upon our usage of language. If new meanings must ever find new words, then we must give up the word religion and the word church. A correspondent of mine, who graduated at Harvard in 1855, in writing to me upon this subject, after expressing his amazement at the harsh and abrupt course of this church, says:

> I fear that you concede too much, and that the old bottles will all have to be broken to pieces, and instead of "church," say simply some form of mutual coöperation. I don't object to "church," but it will be very long before the word is not misunderstood and associated with the old superstitions. Just so I do not think that the term "religion" will very soon come to signify simple, rational morality. And is it not better to say so? To say "we do not want religion, but right living, right thinking, acting, and feeling."

This friend seems to me to strike the matter in the right way. If to be religious one must be also superstitious, then the Agnostics have no right to be called religious. But if to believe in right and wrong, if to believe in chari-

ty and fraternity, if to labor to relieve the under classes of their burdens, if to keep one's hopes fixed upon a lofty ideal, and work ever toward lifting humanity to the plane of that excellence—if this is to be religious, that is to say, if we may project this new meaning into the old term—then we may be said to have our religion and our faith! And if to meet together for the stimulation of these lofty purposes be to us a strength, then, too, we have as good, and as logical, a right to so meet as the Romanist himself!

But it is often said "such a religion would produce no *practical fruits*. Having lost the incentives of supernatural theology, all enthusiasm for practical philanthropic enterprise is also lost." But such a criticism is very shallow, and finds it sufficient and unanswerable refutation when we consider the work done, and the fruit borne by the "Society for Ethical Culture," in the City of New York. That Society proceeds in all its work upon the idea "that it is possible to establish a code of Ethics, resting solely on the enlightened moral consciousness of man, without any reference to Divine Providence, revelation, or a future life," and the extent and beauty of its work is the best vindication of its theory. Besides sustaining a Sunday lectureship, at which eager multitudes always wait for the truly inspired words of that thrice noble leader, Felix Adler, they have established and mantain an "Ethical School," a "Free Kindergarten," an "Industrial School," and a "System of District Nursing." In the Ethical school, the children of the society, and other children, are instructed in a system of natural Ethics, independent of any supernatural basis entirely. And if you could have listened with me to the

calm rational instruction given to a class of young women on the ethics of daily life, you would, I am sure, have felt the last qualm of scepticism slinking slyly away. The kindergarten takes children of the poorest classes and grounds them thoroughly in Froebel's system; and the industrial school "proposes to combine industrial education with instruction in the ordinary branches of a school course;" while the system of district nursing aims to send trained and cultivated nurses to the bedsides of the poor and the degraded. I have not the space at present to adequately picture the splendid work being done by this society; but to those who assert that Agnosticism produces no good fruit, I confidently point out this most admirable institution. In the language of Prof. Adler himself, their motto is, "diversity in creed, unanimity in deed. The vital point with us," he continues, "is to insist on the independence of morality of any religious dogma. While it is commonly held that moral teaching must be based upon some doctrine of Deity or the immortality of the soul, we find in the sovereign law of Ethics itself the foundation of the spiritual life."

I have briefly described the position of the Supernaturalists and that of the Rationalists or Agnostics—and now turn to a few words about the Nondescripts. "Neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red-herring," theologically considered, they like to be classified in turn as belonging to every class. I understand that Mr. Herford has been recently betrayed into an unfortunate simile about a cow and a pump, in describing the Unitarian position. I wish I had seen it. Anything suggestive of a dairy is refresh-

ing—especially a theological dairy. But as I have not, I wish to suggest, as an appropriate analogy for Unitarianism, as compared with other denominations, the phrase "theological *catchall*." This, I think, is appropriate and logical and not too irreverent. Unitarianism does not write down its creed lest somebody might be barred out thereby, or lest the language might grow old. It believes in the largest liberty—but not in writing. It is a camp where unwritten profanity is allowed, but woe to the unfortunate who swears in black and white. If any one doubts this, I offer in evidence my own case. Dozens of friends in this Society stand where I stand—but they do n't wish the world to know it. One of them says, "If is true, I see no use in preaching it"; another, who has often confessed to me his complete agnosticism about the future, has recently become very sad at the prospect of having no one sufficiently orthodox to conduct his funeral exercises. Such symptoms teach me this lesson—though, alas! rather late, I confess—that you may be an Agnostic in a Nondescript pulpit, but you must never confess it!

Looking at the whole position of the Unitarianism of today, it seems to me unworthy the respect of the Supernaturalists or the Rationalists. It is in fact a weak attempt to splice a rope of sand, and, in the nature of things, must fail. It rejects the easy miracles and endorses the more difficult. It believes in the invariability of law, but nevertheless prays, and thus tries to overturn it. It rejects the idea that Jesus was a God—but thinks he was not altogether a man. In fact, as a denomination, it has an architectural peculiarity of the New Jerusalem, with none of its

beauty. That is, it has gates opening in every direction anxious to receive any one to its fold who will ask no questions for conscience sake! And that is why I call it the Church of the Nondescripts! Let no young man within the orthodox lines today be deceived by it. When he gets ready to break with Supernaturalism *in toto*, let him come squarely out, and forever leave the pulpit. But if he would fain linger within church lines, let him remember that Unitarianism, while boasting her freedom from dogmatic Supernaturalism, and while indeed insisting upon fewer articles than the ordinary sectarian, in point of fact, demands all the forms, and boasts all the prestige, of Supernatural theology, without possessing a tittle of its spirit. The young preacher will find that his congregation neglects prayer, but at the same time expects him to pray, that they reject the miracles, but will permit him to do no such thing, that they entertain doubts about a future existence, but will tolerate no acknowledgment of such doubt on his part. In other words, he will come to regard himself, and to despise himself, if he has in him the right material, as a mere functionary, whose duty it is to conceal the smile on his own face as he conducts forms which are empty and meaningless to himself and his hearers. And if he has any doubt of this let him observe the listless stare and unbowed heads of his hearers, when he says: "Let us pray," and the pitiful handful from a great congregation which joins in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Yes! I too reiterate the advice of a religious editor of this town—himself an agnostic in private—and warn all young men within the orthodox ranks, of liberal tenden-

cies, to remain there till such time as they are prepared to forever break with supernaturalism. Unitarianism holds out the promise of liberty, but does not fulfil it. In it you may indeed think as I have thought, but woe to you if you speak as I have spoken! Nor do I think this state of things grows out of intentional dishonesty, but rather out of the attempt to bridge over the chasm between the position of the Supernaturalist and that of the Rationalists. This is a task which defies philosophy. The positions are diametrically opposite. Nay! they are essentially antagonistic, and compared with the attempt to harmonize them the solving of Samson's riddle was child's play. And so it follows, that those who try to unite the two extremes, and please all parties, fall into dire and often amusing confusion.

And now I must close. I could speak much longer upon this suggestive theme; but I have said enough to make evident my conviction that consistency requires one to belong either to the great host of Supernatural religionists, or to the great and increasing host of rationalists. I have said enough also to show that in leaving the pulpit, I lay aside no ambition for the nobilitation of the human race. Before my eyes is the glorious ideal of moral perfection—upon it I would centre your hopes and mine—and indulge the aspiration that in our day and generation we may do at least some little to pave the way for its final victory. I hate to say "good-bye." It is the word that is always breaking in upon the midst of happiness, and yet in this case it is the only word left to say. To the young men and women of

this Church, who have been as my brothers and sisters, let me once more say, be true—be kind—be honest—be brave—and so in this world, or any other, life shall be full of joy and death shall bring no terror. To the members of the Society for all their kindness—barring the meeting of the 13th of February—I say thank you. I should say no less to a servant and could say no more to a king? And to the small band of devoted friends who in the midst of misrepresentation and unkind criticism have stood by my side—sustaining me with their noble words, I can only say—may you ever find friends as true and as loving in every hour of darkness and of storm. Farewell! Yes, farewell, not only to the associations and friendship of this place—but to the toils and hopes of my young manhood, to the ten years I have spent in the pulpit, to the occupations to which I have become accustomed, to the ambitions which I have fondly cherished, to the noble men I have known and loved in the ministry—in a word, to all the old life from which I now turn away—for when I leave this pulpit I will never enter another. And now at last, as for you, I hope the best and brightest things, and for myself, turning my back upon the past, I look into the future with hope and confidence.

APPENDIX.

THE accompanying monologues are printed for the purpose of conveying a correct impression of an attempt to retain the poetic impulse and reflex value of prayer minus its logical incongruity. They were uttered at that point in the public service where prayer is usually offered, and were taken down by a stenographer:

Again we close our eyes upon the world of care and toil, that we may open them upon a world of peace and pure reflection. We would leave behind all sadness, all anxiety, all gloomy thought, and take counsel at this time of our holiest impulses and our serenest philosophy. We would give free rein to all that is best within us—to "run and be glorified," and banish from our hearts all that is unworthy and gross. We come here to think, in order that presently we may feel. May we think clearly and honestly. May we stimulate each other with such enthusiasm for truth as will lift us above servile regard for popular opinion. Oh, that we may be at least true, and unconventional, and brave—without boastfulness. And may the truth beget in us its

most blessed fruits. May sympathy be our daily garb, and honor the habit of our life. May charity shine in all our acts, and modulate with its sweet emphasis all our conversation. May we despise all littleness as unworthy of men. May we be true of heart, gentle of speech, honest in thought, modest in utterance, and above all, may our communion with each other so beget within us the spirit of love as that we shall be above unkind and stupid speech about each other. May we build up in ourselves, and so also in others, true nobility of character, being kind to the poor, gentle to the sick, merciful to the fallen, charitable to the rich, and thus help to dispel the clouds which conceal the dawning of humanity's ideal day. Amen.

We turn our feet from the common path of life into the seclusion of this sacred hour, made sacred to us by our own intentions. At least, for a little while, we bid farewell to the fret and worry of our daily life, to burdens which we in silence carry, and to the trivial pleasures which do so much to dissipate our finer energies and purposes. We come here to find rest, to find light, to gain peace of heart, and strength for the duties which are before us. We come that by the blending of holy purposes we may grow stronger and nobler in all the ways of life. May the stillness of this moment breathe a sweet serenity into our hearts. Looking backward now may we learn to scorn all that has been unworthy of us, all pettiness, all undue anxiety, all counselling with ignoble and time-serving motives. Looking forward, may our aspirations reach after the noblest ideals for ourselves and our fellows.

May we be above despair; above hopelessness! May we be strong for all the burden and whatever of conflict awaits us in the future. And may our intercommunion lead us to such kindly views of each other as will emancipate us from suspicion, and from misinterpretation of each other.

We do not forget the poor—"they are always with us"—may man help the poor! the sick, the blind, and they who are beaten down by the trampling of many feet in the way of life. Oh, may our hearts be full of sympathy and our hands full of help for such. And may we look with yearning eyes for the coming of that day in which there shall be no pain, nor crying, nor weariness of heart. Amen.

FERGUS PRINTING COMPANY CHICAGO.